

Bioethicist discusses targeting parents of obese children

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Photo: U.S. Centers
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Parents of obese children should be targeted in an effort to deal with a serious national problem, according to a viewpoint piece published in the September issue of *JAMA Pediatrics*.

(HealthDay)—Parents of obese children should be targeted in an effort to deal with a serious national problem, according to a viewpoint piece published in the September issue of *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Daniel Callahan, Ph.D., from The Hastings Center in Garrison, New York, questions the acceptability of applying social pressure on parents to deal with their overweight or [obese children](#) and examines whether parents can be told how to raise their children.

The author notes that parent choices are overruled in certain cases such

as wearing [seat belts](#), schooling children, and mandatory vaccinations. In specific cases, morbidly obese children have been removed from their parents' homes; often the parents were also obese or overweight and unable to change their own or their children's eating behavior. Only a minority of physicians mention [child obesity](#) to parents, possibly because the topic is sensitive, and particularly if the parents are obese or unaware of the issue. To deal with obese children and their parents, physicians must realize the severity and pervasiveness of childhood obesity, with about 20 percent of 2- to 19-year-olds categorized as obese. Furthermore, once established, [childhood obesity](#) often carries over into adulthood and is difficult to treat.

"I see no reason then not to apply social pressure on parents to do something about their obese children, and themselves in the process," Callahan writes.

More information: [Full Text \(subscription or payment may be required\)](#)

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